



Survivor Stories

Nartey Dickson: Community Education Brings Family Back to Freedom

Story by Anna Bengel | Photos by Emily Teague

Disability forced Nartey's mother to traffic him into slavery. He lost all hope as a child slave in a fishing village on Lake Volta. Community education efforts brought his family back to freedom. His mother is learning sustainable skills—and he is back in school.

Nartey is the oldest of 10 siblings. His mother, Maria, is disabled. She cannot work in farming, the traditional and predominant occupation of the family's indigenous people in a village in the Central Tongu District of Ghana. She had no way to provide for her children and could not afford school fees, so Nartey had to abandon his education at just 13. That is when Nartey was trafficked to a fishing community along Lake Volta.



The Human Cost of Poverty

Poverty often forces vulnerable families to sell their children into slavery. Ignorance of laws outlawing slavery, as well as laws to punish, prosecute, and imprison perpetrators of human trafficking, exacerbates the crisis.

Nartey's desperate mother arranged his own enslavement out of desperation, to a trafficker who gave her an upfront payment and promised more. The trafficker swore to provide money on a monthly basis to help Maria support her destitute family—Nartey's brothers and sisters. The family was trapped; as the eldest, Nartey was unwittingly trapped, too.

Tricked by the lies of his trafficker, Nartey hoped for a better future—he expected to continue his education in the fishing village. He wanted to be strong—he wanted to provide for his family. The slave trader had assured Maria he would only work on the fishing boats part time.



A Loss of Hope

In his destination community, Nartey soon lost all his dreams for a better life. His slaveholders forced him to work day and night on dangerous and deadly fishing boats. He was under threat of violence and unable to walk away.

Many children are trapped in fishing slavery on Lake Volta, the biggest man-made reservoir in the world. In this huge expanse of water, storms can easily capsize small vessels and kill all those aboard. Children are forced to dive into perilous waters to retrieve tangled nets. Many never resurface. Many never go home.

Forced to suffer as a child slave, Nartey could not exercise his basic rights to education and freedom. He didn't even know he had those rights. The ignorance that leads to modern slavery also keeps it hidden. Today's slavery is a hidden crime—making it harder for the public to see and for vulnerable villagers to understand, and for those in slavery to call out for help.

Freeing Nartey

Vulnerable Ghanaian families need help to build community resistance to child trafficking. Free the Slaves' partner organizations International Needs Ghana (INGH) and community child protection committees work on the front lines to educate communities on child trafficking, child protection violations, and the slavery that devastates some Ghanaian children.



After participating in local education and outreach efforts, Nartey's mother grasped the enslavement of her eldest son. She realized slavery is illegal, and that freedom is a basic human right—then she campaigned for the release of her son.

Nartey was freed from slavery on Sept. 7, 2016. Now 15, he has been re-enrolled in school.

Skills, Not Slavery

Nartey's mother now pleads for alms in her village, making a tiny income to help take care of her 10 children. She now knows the realities of modern slavery her eldest son endured. She would rather beg than traffic her children again.

"I vow not sell them off to any trafficker, although the money I generate on daily basis is not enough to provide all their needs," Maria says. "I am one person who is going to serve as an example...so that [villagers] can refrain from the criminal act of trafficking their children."

With the support of FTS and our front-line partners, Maria is taking crucial steps toward economic independence. She has expressed interest in building vocational skills in hairdressing, so she can become self-reliant and confront the vulnerability Nartey and her other children face to re-enslavement. FTS is committed to help free slaves, tell survivor stories, and create sustainable systems of freedom.



The Growing Up Free Initiative

In June 2015 the Ghana government signed a Child Protection Compact Partnership with the United States. This partnership facilitates an investment of up to \$5 million in U.S. foreign assistance to aid the government and Ghanaian civil society in reducing child trafficking and slavery, and improving child protection throughout the country.

The initiative supports the formation and implementation of a comprehensive, integrated plan for prevention, rescue, prosecution, rehabilitation, reintegration, education, wrap-around social services, the development of market-based livelihoods for vulnerable families, and the formation of communities united in the determination to drive slavery from their midst.

Growing Up Free embodies FTS' proven Community-based Model for Fighting Slavery. Our model's core principle is to create local assets that offset the most salient vulnerabilities that lead to modern slavery: lack of awareness, the absence of strong protective community organizations, household insecurity such as poverty or illness, inadequate legal protections, and survivor vulnerability to re-enslavement.

Growing Up Free pledges to build capacity, educate and mobilize, meet basic needs, and change attitudes and practices in Ghana.



To learn more, visit www.freetheslaves.net or email Ghana@freetheslaves.net.